

A Word About Courage

Our community has experienced several terrorist attacks: the Pentagon, anthrax and the sniper attacks. In addition, we have been exposed to ongoing threats.

The aim of terrorism is to take advantage of our natural fear response. Although few are attacked, many feel threatened. As a result, people worry or feel fear.

After September 11, 2001 we had the chance to see courage and heroism through new eyes. There was the extraordinary courage of rescuers who risked their own lives. There was also the quiet courage of people who took action in other ways, for example, by donating blood, checking up on friends, or returning to their everyday tasks despite their fears.

Courage is NOT absence of fear. It is taking action even though you feel fear or worry.

Courage can be as simple as taking the initiative to tell someone you are sorry, getting your mail during the anthrax scare, or trying out a new activity. Finding small ways to take courageous action can help us regain control of our fears.

Alexandria Community Services Board

- 24-hour emergency crisis intervention services
- 24-hour detoxification services
- Evaluation and assessment
- Individual, family and group counseling
- Day support and vocational services
- Residential services
- Inpatient services
- Prevention and early intervention services
- Service fees are based on ability to pay or without charge
- Multi-language availability

The Alexandria Community Services Board is a group of 16 citizen volunteers appointed by Alexandria's City Council. The CSB oversees the city's publicly funded services for mental health, mental retardation and substance abuse.

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Courageous Action in the Face of Fear



Offering mental health, mental retardation and substance abuse services for the City of Alexandria



(703) 838-6400
24 hours a day
TDD: (703) 838-5054

Fear

Fear is a natural emotion that comes in many forms including worry, anxiety, stress and panic. Fear can be helpful as it is a response to danger. It tells us when we need to pay attention to a situation and check out the facts. On the other hand, chronic worry and stress have been linked to both psychological and physical distress such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and other illnesses. The truth is, everyone feels fear – but that doesn't mean you have to let fear make your decisions for you.

You Have a Choice

How we respond to fear is our *choice*. We can choose to avoid feared situations or we can choose to encounter the feared situation. The more we choose to act with courage, the more quickly we will master our fears.

You might ask for help when deciding to be courageous. Finding a source of support, such as a friend, family member or a counselor, may help us manage our fears.

Our Beliefs about Fear

How we react to things depends on what we believe about them. Fear is no exception. When we recognize the “Fear Factors” that make something more fearful, we can make better, more informed choices about the actions we take in response to our fear.

A terrorist attack tends to be more frightening than everyday risks like car accidents, even though we are far more likely to be affected by the everyday risks. With any fear it's a good idea to check out the reality and likelihood of the situation.

“Fear Factors”

We are more likely to be afraid of something if it follows certain patterns:

- **Dread:** Dying in a terrorist attack is more frightening than dying of a heart attack in your sleep because it is more dreadful.
- **Awareness:** Right now terrorism seems more frightening than mad cow disease because it is on our “radar screen.” The media plays a major role in defining current concerns.
- **Familiarity:** New risks tend to be more frightening than those with which we are familiar.
- **Scale:** Large, catastrophic events like terrorist attacks are more frightening than everyday risks like car accidents, even though we are more likely to be affected by the everyday risk.
- **Identification with victim:** We are afraid of things that target people who are like us versus those who are different than us.

*Adapted from David Ropeik's
“‘Fear Factors’ in the age of Terrorism”
www.msnbc.com/news/643092.asp?cp1=1*

When is Fear a Problem?

- Do you wish you worried less often?
- Do you feel worried or afraid even when things are going well?
- Do worries or fears interfere with your concentration or focus at work?
- Have your fears stopped you from doing major or minor life activities?
- Do you have trouble falling asleep or do you wake up in the middle of the night?
- Do you have physical symptoms such as headaches, nausea or hot flashes?
- Have other people commented about your level of fear or worry?

Take Care of Yourself

- Make a plan and take action.
- Take a break.
- If you must worry, schedule time to for it and don't worry at other times.
- Talk with a friend.
- Use stress management techniques such as breathing, prayer and/or relaxation.
- Exercise, eat well and rest.